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The Eagle has Landed

Groping for a Korean Role in the Pacific War

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Abstract

The first Americans to arrive in Korea following Japan's surrender at the end of World War II brought with them a quartet of Korean soldiers that U.S. officials had recruited for the Eagle Project, the most ambitious American effort to use Koreans in the Pacific War that punctuated a long wartime effort to enlist Allied diplomatic and military support for overseas Koreans. In response, U.S. officials had insisted that Korean exiles in the United States unify their efforts. This condition referenced squabbles among Korean groups in general, with the most transparent being those between Syngman Rhee and Haan Kilsoo. While Korean combatants on the Asian mainland managed to gain some U.S. support for their cause, recognition of their potential came too late in the war for them to help liberate their country. Ultimately, the United States turned to the Japanese and Japanese-trained Koreans to assist in this occupation. Reviewing the history of both Korean lobbying and U.S. response to it provides the opportunity to ask whether better handling of the Korean issue during World War II could have provided U.S. occupation forces with better circumstances to prepare southern Korea for a swift, and unified, independence.

Keywords

Eagle Project – Haan Kilsoo – Korean Provisional Government – Syngman Rhee – U.S. postwar policy – exiled governments

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As his C-36 fighter entered Korean airspace, Lieutenant Colonel Willis Bird noticed a Japanese fighter heading directly at him in a deadly game of aerial chicken, a suicidal pilot aiming to thwart his attempt to land in Keijō (Seoul).¹ The Japanese plane, however, veered off at the last second to avoid collision. Its pilot then established radio contact with Bird to inform the American that he had a guarantee of safe passage to the Yōūido airfield on the Han River. The date was 18 August 1945, just three short days after the Japanese emperor had declared his country's decision to take the "extraordinary measure" of accepting the surrender terms that the Allied leaders had issued at the Potsdam Conference the previous month in Germany. World War II in the Pacific was over; it was time to clean up the mess left in its wake.

Anticipating this task, U.S. officials had been planning to occupy Japanese strong points quickly and secure the release of Allied prisoners of war (POWs). To facilitate the anticipated U.S. occupation of southern Korea, Bird himself had proposed plans to fly into the region several teams of Eagle Project participants, Koreans that the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had trained to gather information and commit acts of sabotage behind Japanese lines. But with Japan's surrender, their mission now focused on occupation duties. Bird received the following orders on the very day the emperor's speech was broadcast across the Japanese empire:

You are going under the general authority of the Eagle project and reporting back conditions as you find them. One of your primary missions will be to assist in the controlling, care, and evacuation of Prisoners of War. ... Under no circumstances should you accept surrender from any Japanese Forces unless specifically ordered to do so at a later date.²

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- 1 Details of this mission, known as the Eagle Mission, located in Records of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] New York/Overseas Station, Record Group [RG] 226, National Archives II [NAII], College Park, MD; "Yank Rescue Team Cursed and Wined By Japs in Korea," *The Lafayette Ledger*, 26 October 1945, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=950&dat=19451206&id=vQtQAAAAIBA&sjid=HIUDAAAIBA&pg=1155,6843757> (accessed 9 November 2013); Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 229–33; Robert J. Myers, *Korea in the Cross Currents: A Century of Struggle and the Crisis of Reunification* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Chapter 5; Kim Chun-yōp, *Changjōng 1.na ūi kwangbokgun sichōl sang [The Long March: My Experiences with the Glorious Restoration Army]* (Seoul: Tosōch'ulp'an, 1987).
 - 2 Mission to Korea to Lieutenant Colonel Willis H. Bird, 15 August 1945, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records. There were believed to be five areas in Korea where Japanese ran Allied prisoner of war camps: Keijō (Seoul), Jinsen (In'chōn), Seishin (Chōngjin),

The mission proceeded with caution. For example, it aborted its first attempt on 15 August after receiving reports that warned of continued *kamikaze* attacks on Allied ships. The second attempt three days later left Xian, China with eighteen Americans and four Koreans, who flew over 1,000 miles across enemy-controlled Chinese territory to reach Korea.³

One of Bird's Korean passengers was Kim Chung-yöp. Scratched from the initial aborted mission, Korean General Yi Pöm-sök personally asked him to join the crew of the second mission. Kim, like a number of his colleagues in the Kwangbok (Glorious Restoration) Army, held the distinction of having fought for three militaries over the course of World War II. Drafted into the Japanese Army while a student at Keiō University in Tokyo, he escaped to served under General Yi in China. Later, the OSS recruited him along with other promising Korean rebels to participate in the Eagle Project. Kim's memoirs suggest Korean participants harboring a rather ambitious goal in joining the mission. They considered themselves as part of advance teams of Koreans dropped off in Korea to pave the way for arrival of exiled members of the self-styled Korean Provisional Government (KPG)⁴ that was then headquartered just outside the temporary Chinese capital of Chongqing. Kim recalled his expectations at the time:

Our responsibility was very heavy. At the time of entering the country, we would bring Korean soldiers who had been conscripted by the Japanese military. We were to assume control, command Japanese disarmament, and organize a national self-defense force. We were to make a kind of atmosphere where evil political people would not have influence.

Kim also emphasized that the Eagle Project “needed to work with patriots in Korea to quickly create a base for the Korean Provisional Government and the Kwangbok Army to return.”⁵

Konan (Hüngnam), and Rimpo (Impo?). Undated memorandum, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records.

- 3 Willis H. Bird would be decorated with the Soldiers Medal on 4 November 1945 for his role in leading the Prisoner of War Humanitarian Mission, box 57, Willis H. Bird file, 1941–1945, OSS Personnel Files, RG 226, NAI.
- 4 Korean exiles formed the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in Shanghai just after the 1 March 1919 independence uprising, only to split over ideological and tactical differences. Syngman Rhee served as its initial president, but his associates soon forced him out of office. Under the leadership of Kim Ku, it developed into a relatively stable organization over the war years.
- 5 At least this was Kim Chun-yöp's interpretation of his role. Kim, *Changjông*, p. 536. As we shall see later, the OSS had made contacts with KPG President Kim Ku, which may have

The Japanese greeted the mission with hostility. Kim described the tense faceoff that followed arrival of the Koreans as so thick “I imagined hearing General Yi’s gun go off several times; mine almost went off, as well.”⁶ After tensions eased, Bird explained his intentions to the Japanese officers. Meanwhile, Kim managed to pass on messages to Korean guards serving in the Japanese military of the plans he and his associates had to escort the KPG to Seoul in the near future. Both Bird and the Koreans failed to complete the ambitions that brought them to Keijō on this day. The Japanese refused the Americans the information they sought regarding POWs, except to say that “they were safe and in good hands, and were being properly taken care of.” The Koreans on the mission, rather than returning with KPG officials, were dropped off in Wexien on the Shandong Peninsula; their aspirations remained unfulfilled until well after the U.S. XXIV Army Corps arrived in early September 1945 to occupy southern Korea.

The Eagle Project, inaugurated in February 1945, in part represented a turning point in the attitude of the United States toward utilizing Koreans in the Pacific War. From this time, they began to train Koreans in tactics to frustrate the Japanese behind enemy lines, and also met with KPG leaders on a pseudo-official basis. The Project’s late start, Japan’s sudden surrender, and U.S. abandonment of its participants in China after the war’s end robbed Koreans of a role (albeit a symbolic one) in liberating their country. This last American decision not to make use of the Korean trainees during U.S. occupation of southern Korea, forced the occupiers to assume their duties with a critical deficiency of people with practical knowledge of the Korean language and society. The alternative that this occupation force chose, reinstating those who worked with the recently defeated Japanese, made little sense to the majority of Koreans who hardly had recovered from the euphoria of liberation from colonial rule and provided political rivals with a major point of contention.⁷ In reviewing the history of Korean engagement with U.S. officials during World War II, the possibility exists that there were alternatives to the post-liberation administration that the U.S. occupiers introduced to southern Korea. What concerns did Allied

encouraged Kim’s belief that the United States would support the KPG’s political authority during its postwar occupation of Korea.

6 Ibid., p. 543.

7 James I. Matray writes that the decision to use certain Japanese in Korea after the war was one the U.S. government made quite early in the wartime planning of the Korean occupation. In early 1944, State Department officials decided that U.S. occupation officials would have the authority to use Japanese technicians in areas where qualified Koreans were lacking. James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941–1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1985), 22.

officials voice in opposition to using Koreans in either a political and military capacity? Were they legitimate? Might the contingent of Eagle Project participants, and other Korean guerrilla efforts, have proven useful had the Allied forces better utilized these human resources earlier? Finally, why did they not employ these personnel assets after the war had ended?

The Eagle Project benefitted in part from the relentless lobby effort that exiled Korean groups conducted in search of diplomatic recognition and military support.⁸ Correspondence from Koreans to U.S. officials often linked two goals: U.S. recognition of a Korean government might qualify it for military assistance and receiving it would imply political recognition. U.S. reports on this scenario cautioned against any contact with Koreans or aid to them because this might suggest official U.S. recognition of a Korean political entity. This reluctance to offer them assistance frustrated Korean exiled political groups who included in their arguments references to the commitments they believed the United States had made to them in the past. For example, members charged U.S. betrayal over its failure to honor the terms of their 1882 treaty of amity and duplicity over its failure to support with action the glorious statements U.S. presidents had regularly uttered regarding the people's right of sovereignty. In terms of recognition, however, U.S. stated policy toward Korea meshed with the conditions to which it held other governments in exile: recognition was contingent on demonstrating popular support among constituents in the occupied territory they had abandoned, which for these Koreans was a near impossible task.⁹

Among the exiled Koreans were those who had been lobbying their country's cause from even before Japan formally annexed the peninsula in 1910. Koreans appeared at every major international conference in the hopes of securing a seat at the table. In 1907, at the Second International Conference on

8 For one of the more comprehensive reviews of Korean lobbying up until the December 1943 Cairo Conference, see Hong-Kyu Park, "From Pearl Harbor to Cairo: America's Korean Diplomacy, 1941-1943," *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 343-58.

9 The French example is instructive. Even though at war with Germany, the United States maintained relations with the pro-German Vichy French government and refused to recognize the government in exile General Charles de Gaulle established until late in the war, after Secretary of State Cordell Hull retired and Edward R. Stettinius Jr. had replaced him in November 1944. As Raoul Aglion learned, de Gaulle's organization was one of a handful of disunited French independence movements operating in New York City. Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle: Allies in Conflict, A Personal Memoir* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 17. E. Bruce Reynolds traces a similar development in U.S. policy toward the "Free Thai" Movement in his *Thailand's Secret War: OSS, SOE and the Free Thai Underground During World War II* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 430.

Peace at The Hague, the participants denied the Koreans a seat, ruling that their diplomatic affairs were in the hands of the Japanese, as stipulated in the 1905 protectorate agreement.¹⁰ This lobby became particularly active in the years that followed the end of World War I. Encouraged by President Woodrow Wilson's call for a "free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims," Koreans on 1 March 1919 throughout the peninsula took to the streets to declare their country's independence from Japanese rule, and organized a delegation to present their case formally in Paris before the international community. As before at The Hague, and as would be the case at the Washington Conference (1921–1922), the attendees again denied Koreans a compassionate ear for their cause. The victors in the Great War had more pressing issues to negotiate with Japan, notably withdrawal from the Shantung peninsula in China that it had seized from Germany in the early stages of the conflict, along with its cooperation in accepting naval arms limitations. Any assistance that these powers might have offered the Korean people would have flown in the face of hypocrisy. They, after all, also held and intended to continue to guard closely their own colonial possessions.

The Koreans responded by organizing. In April 1919, the KPG formed in Shanghai with Syngman Rhee (Yi Süngman), then residing in Hawaii, selected as its inaugural president. Almost immediately, the KPG suffered factional disputes that would plague the body even after Korea's liberation from Japanese rule. Its members united in purpose, but divided over method. Specifically, should the KPG advance diplomatic or military means to drive the Japanese from the Korean peninsula? For the next two decades, the KPG fell silent. Awakened by first Japan's invasion of China after July 1937 and then its attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1945, it intensified its efforts to gain the attention of the Allied powers and place itself in a position to assume political leadership in Korea once Japan's inevitable defeat came. Forced to endure many relocations in concert with Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang forces fighting in China, the KPG finally settled near Chongqing. Soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, KPG President Kim Ku appointed Rhee, who his associates earlier had eased out of the presidency, as its representative in Washington. The war years witnessed Korean politicians making numerous attempts to form a coalition under the KPG umbrella including the conservative Korean Independence Party, the more radical Korean Revolutionary Party, and various minor political groups.¹¹

10 Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 7–10.

11 Suzuki Masayuki outlines this history and the problem of Korean unity in "The Korean National Liberation Movement in China and International Response," in Dae-Sook Suh

Korean lobbyists received cautious encouragement after U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued in August 1941 the Atlantic Charter that echoed Woodrow Wilson's earlier statements by promising "to respect the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live."¹² Korean responses to the declaration, however, were initially critical. They called for concrete signs of action to support these ambitious words. This cautious response proved sagacious, as the British and American leaders were in no position to act on their aspirations while German planes rained bombs on English cities. Churchill found himself having to defend his participation in a statement that many interpreted as his favoring the demise of the British Empire. Roosevelt, though no fan of imperial activity, also believed that colonized peoples recently liberated were not in a position to assume political responsibility immediately. Rather, they required a period of tutelage, or trusteeship, to instruct them in the essentials of establishing a liberal democratic government and adopting free market economic principles.¹³

Drawn into the war by Japan, Roosevelt, to Churchill's dismay,¹⁴ extended the parameters of the Atlantic Charter to include the Pacific theater in a February 1942 fireside chat. On this occasion the president noted the plight of the "people of Korea and Manchuria [who] knew in their flesh the harsh despotism of Japan." "The Atlantic Charter applies," he continued, "... to the whole world."¹⁵ Thereafter, the future of the British and French empires would

and Edward J. Shultz (eds.), *Koreans in China*, 115–43 (Honolulu: Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawai'i, 1990).

- 12 This was the Atlantic Charter's third point. Quoted in Douglas Brinkley and David R. Facey-Crowther (eds.), *The Atlantic Charter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), xvii.
- 13 Ideas regarding the structure of the postwar trusteeship arrangement, most importantly the participants in the joint occupation, would draw debate throughout the war. However, U.S. officials had made the decision that the Korean people would be granted their independence "in due course" prior to these infamous words first appearing in the Cairo Communiqué of December 1943. For debate about the U.S. Korean trusteeship policy prior to the Cairo meeting, see Matray, *Reluctant Crusade*, pp. 16–21 and Park, "From Pearl Harbor to Cairo."
- 14 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had responded to original criticism by reasoning that since it was an Atlantic Charter, it targeted Nazi-controlled territories, rather than Britain's Asian territories. See David Reynolds, "The Atlantic 'Flop': British Foreign Policy and the Churchill-Roosevelt Meeting of August 1941," in *The Atlantic Charter*, p. 146.
- 15 See Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat 20: On the Progress of the War," 23 February 1942, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3326> (accessed 27 May 2013). Secretary of State Cordell Hull echoed Roosevelt's remarks in a radio speech broadcast in July 1942 titled "The War and Human Freedom." Park, "From Pearl Harbor to Cairo," p. 352.

provide a bone of contention between the president and Churchill and a point of amusement for Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. As for the Korean exiles, they were skeptical about the Atlantic Charter. Nevertheless, they invoked its spirit to remind the Allied leaders of their responsibilities under the Charter. One U.S.-based Korean group issued a press release, timed to coincide with the first anniversary of the Roosevelt-Churchill meeting, mocking the Atlantic Charter's promise of sovereignty as "misleading" and "completely meaningless." Time, however, remained on the Allied powers' side should they decide to back their lofty promises with practical action:

Twenty-three million Koreans are ripe for revolt; they are ready to build a huge bonfire in the backyard of Japan. All that is needed to start the conflagration is for the State Department to fulfill the pledge made by President Roosevelt on behalf of the American people.¹⁶

This rather exaggerated statement echoed criticism directed in the past as justification for Japan's annexation of the Korean peninsula and the U.S. recognition of Japan's paramount position on the Korean peninsula—the people's inability to act independently to protect its own interests.¹⁷ It would reappear on a number of occasions in the years before the war's end.

Though united in message, Korean exiles, like wartime lobbyists for other peoples, failed in their attempts to form a united front (*t'ong il chōnsōn*) to bring cohesion to their efforts. State Department officials used one particularly intense clash between two Washington-based rivals, Syngman Rhee and Haan Kilsoo (Han Kilsū), to justify their decision not to recognize a Korean government in exile. These two Koreans attempted to portray themselves as both official and reliable. After KPG President Kim Ku appointed him "Chairman of the Korean Commission," Rhee adopted as the KPG's "official representative" a protocol that was expected of government representatives upon their arrival in a national capital to assume duties.¹⁸ On another occasion, he

16 Korean American Council, undated press release, *Internal Affairs of Korea (1940–1944)*, *Migukkukmu sōng Hanguk kwanke munsō* [*Papers of the United States Department of State, Korea*], vol.1 (Seoul: Wonjumunhwasa, 1993), 97.

17 U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt had registered a similar criticism in arguing Korea's lack of capacity to govern as a sovereign state. In a letter to Secretary of State John Hay, he quipped that Koreans "could not strike one blow in their own defense." Quoted in Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of American World Power* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 323.

18 Kim Ku dispatched a "letter of credential" for this purpose. However, his initial attempt failed because he sent it to the president, rather than the secretary of state. The KPG

unsuccessfully invoked a plea of diplomatic immunity to escape a speeding violation.¹⁹ Both Rhee and Haan were extremely active, and reasonably successful, in lobbying U.S. government officials in support of Korea's situation. Rhee's efforts in particular succeeded in gathering a sizeable contingent of influential followers that included politicians, businessmen, professionals, and religious figures who lobbied the U.S. Congress on behalf of the KPG's pretensions.

The Korean Liberty Conference, held in Washington in early 1942, in many ways demonstrated both the Korean Commission's successes and shortcomings. The conference agenda carried symbols of Korea's long struggle for independence. It included talks by the attorney John W. Stagers and U.S. Representative John M. Coffee (D. Wash.), both active supporters of Korea's cause. It introduced Sŏ Chae-pil (Phillip Jaisohn), the founder of the short-lived Independence Club (*Tongnip hyŏphoe*, 1896–1898), and Homer B. Hulbert, a missionary-journalist who wrote extensively on Japanese injustice toward Korea from early in the century.²⁰ The organizers found Princess Minn [Min] of the Yi Dynasty that Japan deposed in 1910 to sing Korea's national anthem. The event climaxed on March First to commemorate the twenty-third anniversary of the day when Koreans organized their largest, and most important, anti-Japanese demonstration.²¹ American officials in attendance, however, were unimpressed. State Department official William R. Langdon described the event as a "publicity stunt" that left little "to encourage hope for Korean independence." As he further reported,

not a word was said about plans or organization for resistance to Japan or for independence. ... As for the addresses, they dealt with the past and showed no knowledge of the problems of the present and were totally lacking in constructiveness. Moreover, not a note of self-help was sounded. In fact, there were many allusions to the opportunity which was now presented to the United States for "atoning" for its failure in 1905 to defend and save Korean independence. An objective stranger would have

corrected this error, later sending an "official" letter through the proper channel to replace the earlier "unofficial" communication. Syngman Rhee to Cordell Hull, 7 February 1942, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 1, p. 324.

19 George T. Summerlin to A. J. Tzombatta, 17 April 1943, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 3, p. 348.

20 Homer Hulbert's books, which include *History of Korea* (1905) and *The Passing of Korea* (1906), were very critical of Japanese activities on the Korean peninsula.

21 For a copy of the program, see *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 1, p. 420.

gathered the impression from the meeting that the independence of Korea is entirely an American problem²²

Langdon's assessment carried weight in policy formulation because he was one of the State Department's few Korea experts.

Haan Kilsoo, Syngman Rhee's primary rival, came to Hawaii as a boy in 1905 with his parents who found employment at the Oahu Sugar Company. In 1932, he joined the China-based Sino-Korean People's League and, like Rhee, acted as the organization's representative in the U.S. capital. Haan used intelligence that he claimed to have gathered through Japan-based contacts, including members of the ultra-conservative Black Dragon Society (*Kokurūkai*), to establish his credibility among U.S. officials. Early in June 1941, he contacted Andrei A. Gromyko, the counselor at the Soviet ambassador in Washington, with news that Adolf "Hitler's armies are ready to invade the USSR" sometime that month.²³ On 5 December 1941, he addressed a letter to Far Eastern Division Chief Maxwell M. Hamilton informing that Japan "may suddenly move against Hawaii, 'this coming weekend,'" which, of course, it did.²⁴ Like Rhee, Haan also maintained a list of contacts that included an impressive array of important people in Washington. Haan's somewhat shady background—some suspected him of harboring pro-Japanese sentiment and the Federal Bureau of

22 U.S. Department of State, Division of Far Eastern Affairs, "Korean Liberty Conference," *ibid.*, p. 445.

23 Kilsoo Haan to Andrei A Gromyko, 3 June 1941, folder 2, box 2, Kilsoo Haan Papers, University of California, Santa Cruz Library, Santa Cruz, CA. It appears that the Soviets received information on this impending invasion from a number of sources, including a detailed description of Operation Barbarossa from Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles. David L. Roll, *The Hopkins Touch: Harry Hopkins and the Forging of the Alliance to Defeat Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110.

24 Maxwell M. Hamilton reportedly threatened to "put him away for the duration of the war if he spilled this news to the press or to Senators [Guy M.] Gillette or [Tom C.] Connally [*sic*]." News of Haan Kilsoo's prediction did make the *Washington Post* on 12 April 1942. Both of these documents are located in folder 2, box 2, Kilsoo Haan Papers. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover contacted Haan on 4 February 1942 to arrange for a meeting to discuss the Korean informant's information. J. Edgar Hoover to Haan, 4 February 1942, folder 1, *ibid.* Colonel M. Preston Goodfellow commented in a memorandum that Haan's information "was of very little value." In Harold B. Hoskins to Hamilton and Stanley K. Hornbeck, 23 April 1942, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 2, p. 66. Goodfellow's close ties with Rhee almost certainly inspired this comment. Bruce Cumings outlines this relationship in *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 188-89.

Investigation investigated him regarding this claim—perhaps constricted the degree to which his contacts could lobby on his behalf.²⁵

Haan made frequent use of both the press and the radio to provide the American people with a basic introduction to his country, lobby for U.S. diplomatic support, and suggest ways in which Koreans could contribute to the war effort against Japan. In May 1942, for example, he offered a history lesson on U.S.-Korean relations that took his audience back to the 1882 Treaty of Friendship that the two countries had signed. This treaty, he informed, was the “first to be negotiated between Korea and any Western” nation and “marked a distinct break with tradition running back to Korea’s distant past.” Like members of the Korean Commission, Haan also saw it as necessary to charge the United States with responsibility for Korea’s present plight. Just over a decade after the United States and Korea had forged diplomatic ties, Japan engaged China (1894–1895) and then Russia (1904–1905) in wars that Tokyo claimed to have fought on behalf of Korea, but in fact to impose its domination over it. Had the United States “adopted a strong policy toward maintaining Korean independence,” Haan criticized, these wars might have been prevented. The United States, he continued, could atone for its mistakes by extending to Korea diplomatic recognition. In return, he predicted, the Korean people were prepared to contribute their share should they be given a chance to fight the Japanese. Some Korean lives would no doubt be sacrificed but “I say, and my people say, let it come—we would rather die by American bombs than live as servants to the Japanese.”²⁶

Haan, like Rhee, had little luck in convincing the State Department of the merits of U.S. recognition of a Korean political entity, be it the KPG or a claimant to authority that other exiles organized. The United States, not eager to lend support prematurely to any single Korean group, handled the recognition issue in a number of ways. Early in the war, it petitioned its Allies—China and Britain—for their input. The U.S. Embassy in London dispatched a telegram in late February 1942 to Secretary of State Cordell Hull revealing that the Koreans had made contacts with the Chinese Embassy there. It provided a reason for

25 Some U.S. politicians were supportive of both Haan and Rhee. For example, Congressman Guy M. Gillette wrote a recommendation letter for Haan. Guy M. Gillette to Mr. J. Kyuang Dunn, Secretary United Korean Committee, 10 December 1942, folder 1, box 2, Haan Papers. Gillette also introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives urging President Franklin D. Roosevelt to recognize the KPG. Park, “From Pearl Harbor to Cairo,” p. 355.

26 Kilsoo K. Haan, “The American Korean Treaty: 60 Years Old this Month 1882–1942,” 22 May 1942, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 1, pp. 273–74.

the Allied governments not extending diplomatic recognition to any of the many rival Korean groups:

The following approaches have been made to His Majesty's Embassy at Chungking soon after the outbreak of war in the Pacific by Mr. Tjoso Wang [Cho So-ang] purporting to be Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea who handed in letters addressed to Mr. Churchill and the Prime Minister of Canada expressing solidarity with the Allied cause and belief in an Allied victory. Similar messages were received from organizations called the Korean National Revolutionary Party, the Korean National Association for the fight for liberty, the Korean National United Comrades Association and from a Mr. Ching Jo-Shan [Ching Cho-san] describing himself as Commander of the Korean Volunteers Corps.

The U.S. Embassy reported that Chinese officials described the Koreans as unified in purpose, but "disunified in their policies from republican radicalism to reactionary monarchism." It further offered that, while the Allies could exploit their anti-Japanese ambitions, "there could be no question of any sort of recognition of a free Korean movement until [they eliminated their] factional differences." This rather lengthy telegram added that the war's progress—or, at that point, the lack there of—also prevented any positive consideration toward Korean requests as "any formal declaration of recognition ... would be unlikely to arouse a response on a really effective scale amongst Koreans generally in the areas where the Japanese are in control."²⁷

Squabbles among Korean groups no doubt strengthened Allied arguments against extending to them diplomatic recognition. Rhee and Haan exacerbated the problem when they drew U.S. officials into their disagreement, as was the case in January 1942. Just after the Pearl Harbor attack, Haan and Rhee began contacting State Department officials separately to confirm that U.S.-based Koreans would be exempt from wartime restrictions that the U.S. government then was imposing on Japanese residents in the United States. Responses uniformly informed both representatives that as long as Koreans had registered as such under the Alien Registration Act of July 1940, the U.S. government should consider them separately as friendly aliens.²⁸ Yet word reached both Rhee and

27 H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, 28 February 1942, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 346.

28 Both Koreans were reacting to reports that the U.S. government had subjected Koreans across the United States to restrictions imposed on enemy aliens and nationals living in the United States. For example, U.S. officials in Los Angeles and Chicago had ordered

Haan that Koreans continued to receive classification as “enemy aliens.” This problem entangled the Rhee-Haan feud when John W. Staggers, the attorney for the Korean Commission, censored Haan for encroachment on Korean Commission authority, which in turn was causing “confusion and misunderstanding.” “The Korean Commission is recognized by the State Department as the official representative of the Provisional Government of Korea,” Staggers stated emphatically. “It, therefore, follows that the proper procedure would be for you to submit to the Korean Commission, to be forwarded through official channels, any communication which you wish to address to any of the departments in Washington.” If Haan was unwilling to conform to the above the KPG will demand that he “cease all activities in connection with the Korean cause.”²⁹ Had Staggers limited his audience to Haan the issue most likely would have ended without incident. The attorney, however, forwarded a copy of the letter to the State, War, Navy, and Justice departments, which alerted these offices to this particular inner-Korean dispute. Stanley K. Hornbeck, who served as advisor of political relations in the State Department, received the task of authoring a reply. In it, he sternly reminded Staggers that to date, “no agency of the American Government has at any time recognized any commission or agency or person as the official representative of a provisional government of Korea.”³⁰

Over the course of the war, the State Department provided various reasons for its reluctance to recognize a Korean political organization as the legitimate exiled representative government of Korea. When Senator Guy M. Gillette (D. Iowa) approached the department in mid-December 1941 to lobby for Korea’s cause, it informed him that, although “sympathetic,” as the “exchange of diplomatic representatives and attachés between the Japanese Empire and the United States Government has been effected,” the United States could not take any action that might threaten those Americans still in Japanese custody with “abuse or misuse.” The State Department also informed the senator of its concern that recognizing Korea also might “disrupt the espionage system in Japan.”³¹ Bills for U.S. recognition of a Korean exiled government that representatives submitted in Congress, such as the one George

Koreans to close their bank accounts and businesses. Rhee to Harold B. Hoskins, 9 December 1941, *ibid.*, p. 208. For Haan’s inquiry, see Haan to Fletcher Warren, 12 December 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 210–11.

29 John W. Staggers to Haan, 30 January 1942, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 481.

30 Hornbeck to Staggers, 3 February 1942, *ibid.*, p. 483. See also, Memorandum, 9 February 1942, that expanded on the contents of Hornbeck’s letter, *ibid.*, p. 487.

31 OSS Memoranda, undated, 1942–1967, folder 1, box 4, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

O'Brien (D. Mich.) sponsored in the House of Representatives on 31 March 1943, ultimately met rejection.³² Nevertheless, the Koreans persisted. For example, Syngman Rhee's letter to President Harry S. Truman after Roosevelt's death triggered in May 1945 a detailed response from Acting Secretary of State Frank P. Lockhart that rather bluntly reminded Rhee of his organization's limitations:

The "Korean Provisional Government" has never had administrative authority over any part of Korea nor can it be considered representative of the Korean people of today. Its following even among exile Koreans is limited. It is the policy of this Government in dealing with groups such as the "Korean Provisional Government" to avoid taking action which might, when the victory of the United Nations is achieved, tend to compromise the right of the Korean people to choose the ultimate form and personnel of the government which they might want to establish. Such a policy is consistent with this Government's attitude toward all people under Axis domination or liberated therefrom.³³

Rhee refused, however, to take no for an answer.

Both Haan and Rhee, along with many other Koreans located primarily in the United States and China, recognized the necessity of unifying their efforts to best reach their goals.³⁴ There was some progress in this direction, as groups conferred with the hope of finding common ground for merger. Leaders of the Korean Independence Party, which monopolized positions of power in the KPG, were willing to include members of the rival Korean Revolutionary Party and other groups, but only as minority participants with little actual power or influence. They also rejected the thought of including Haan Kilsoo in their plans. U.S. officials frequently cited this political disunity as the primary reason for their reluctance to extend to any Koreans diplomatic recognition, and it remains rather convenient even today to criticize Korean factionalism for the

32 George O'Brien offered this as a joint resolution on 31 March 1942. *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 3, p. 369.

33 Rhee letter, 15 May 1945 and Frank P. Lockhart response, 5 June 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945*, Vol. VI: *The British Commonwealth, the Far East* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 1028–31.

34 This goal receives emphasis in biographies of both Kim Kyu-sik and Yō Un-hyōng, two Koreans working for Korea's liberation in China. For Kim's efforts, see Usa yōngu hoe Yōk'um, *Hangil tongnip t'uchaeng kwa choa u hapjak (The Anti-Japanese Independence Struggle and Left-Right Unity)* (Seoul: Hanul, 2000). For Yō's efforts, see Yi Kihyōng, *Yō Unhyōng p'yōngjōn (Yō Unhyōng: A Critical Biography)* (Seoul: Silch'ōn munhaksa, 2010).

inability to place shared goals ahead of personal differences. However, even among Koreans at the time were those who doubted that the United States would extend diplomatic recognition to the KPG even if it succeeded in fashioning an ever-elusive united political front. The reasoning behind this pessimism was the State Department's oft-stated argument that wartime diplomatic recognition would compromise the Korean people's choice of leadership following liberation from Japanese rule. Wartime officials, however, rarely considered the unwanted consequences that this decision might present in the war's aftermath, when the United States would have to assist Koreans in navigating a path from colonial liberation to national independence.

As Korean political bodies jockeyed for U.S. influence, several bands of Koreans engaged the Japanese military in combat in southern Manchuria and northern Korea. Koreans realized little success in convincing the Allied forces to recognize a provisional government in exile; they did, however, enjoy limited progress in gaining support for Korean rebel groups fighting on the Asian mainland. Korean lobbyists first sought their country's inclusion in the Lend-Lease Act passed in March 1941 to supply Allied armies with arms to battle Axis powers. Their success depended on a number of factors, the most important being whether—as stated in Section 3, a-1 of the legislation—the president deemed the Korean peninsula to be “vital to the defense of the United States.”³⁵ Additionally, the United States would have to find credible in terms of numbers and allegiances the claims that the Korean exiled leaders were making about the services of independence fighters they had volunteered. Here again we will consider the arguments involved with the United States taking this limited step, while considering whether it missed a wartime and postwar opportunity in limiting its support of this potential resource.

Korean claims in Washington raised questions among U.S. officials over the number of Korean troops they reported were battling the Japanese on the Asian mainland, as well as the degree to which they controlled these troops. In December 1941, Rhee tried to press this issue in a conversation with State Department official Alger Hiss, who Hornbeck had assigned to meet with the KPG representative just after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. In his report summarizing the meeting, Hiss recorded Rhee's emphasis on the

urgency of getting supplies to Chungking before the Burma Road is out In this connection [Rhee's] main interest was that supplies be sent to Chungking for the use of what he referred to as the National Korean

35 Quoted in, Edward R. Stettinius Jr., *Lend-Lease: Weapons for Victory* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 335–39.

Army which he said is now operating in China and which ... he asserts has been recognized by the Chinese Government.

The State Department official included in his report Rhee's claim that U.S. recognition of the KPG would also "enable his organization to receive Lend-Lease assistance."³⁶

Not to be outdone, Haan Kilsoo, who Rhee described to Hiss as a one-time "Japanese spy," also lobbied for U.S. military assistance. In a letter to Secretary of State Hull, Haan again drew from history to explain Korea's deep-seeded hatred of Japan. Korean blood had flowed, he avowed, with detestation of the Japanese since 1592 when "three thousand Jap soldiers ... swarmed the coasts of the ancient Kingdom of Korea, laying waste to her cities, her farmlands, and treasures." The contemporary Korean suffering under Japanese bondage "still lives for the day when he can settle the score for three and a half centuries of humiliation against the Jap." Haan again blamed the United States for Korea's present predicament. Had it answered Korean appeals made during the March 1919 Independence Movement, Koreans would have avoided the factional divisions that then plagued them. Just as the American forefathers had required "moral and material aid from some European Powers," he continued, "so too do Koreans from the United States today."³⁷ Later, during an appearance on the radio program "Victory Starts at Home" in August 1943, Haan switched tactics when he emphasized the recent accomplishments of Koreans battling against the Japanese in China. In February and March 1942, he claimed, a "nation wide revolt" left over three thousand Japanese dead and over one hundred warplanes destroyed. In June, Pak Soowon (Pak Süwon) had attacked and slightly wounded Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki and former Prime Minister Hirota Kōki. Haan promised his audience that if given the chance, Koreans could "be of service to the Allied cause, and eventually, regain our country, so as to take our rightful place in the family of nations in the Far East."³⁸

36 Memorandum of Conversation, 17 December 1941, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 1, p. 221. Cumings writes that Rhee continued his efforts to gain U.S. support for Korean troops and even schemed with Goodfellow of the OSS to enact a plan that, like the Eagle Project begun in 1945, would send Koreans behind enemy lines. Cumings, *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes*, p. 188.

37 Haan to Hull, 5 May 1942, *Internal Affairs of Korea*, vol. 1, pp. 78–81.

38 "Victory Starts at Home, Script 140," 28 August 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 101–107. Haan's assertion of a Korean's attack on Tōjō Hideki received coverage in the U.S. media. For one example, see the 12 August 1942 edition of the St. Petersburg, Florida *Evening Independent*, http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=950&dat=19420812&id=6_dPAAAAIBAJ&sjid=MVUDAAAIAI&pg=4607,5081592 (accessed 1 October 2012). In this case, the report

Paralleling responses on the issue of KPG recognition, these pleas for Allied military forces to train, equip, and mobilize Koreans in exile armies generated some attention. Britain had been doing this on a limited scale since the beginning of the Pacific War. In April 1945, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) completed a secret report titled "Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort" that summarized the efforts to date that the U.S. government had made to engage Koreans in the war against Japan. Exiled Koreans, the report acknowledged, had pushed for many of these actions.³⁹ The operational questions it entertained were as follows: "Is it politically advisable and militarily feasible to utilize Koreans in the war effort against Japan? If so, what form should such utilization take?" The report first confirmed the number of Koreans available for this purpose, estimating that the largest population resided in China and consisted of "several thousands of Koreans operating with the guerrilla units in north China," and "about one hundred Korean soldiers organized into the so-called 'Korean Independence Army' in the Chungking region." It further identified an additional three hundred Korean civilians in China as having utilization capacity. The U.S. military also could draw from pockets of Korean-American citizens and students in the United States, including as well Koreans residing in other parts of the world, such as in the British Empire. However, the greatest potential was in the

several thousand male Koreans of military age, who formerly served in labor battalions in the Japanese army or as civilian laborers Koreans [who] have revealed [in interrogations to be] to a greater or lesser degree anti-Japanese.⁴⁰

It was from this population that the Eagle Project largely drew its core of participants.

The SWNCC report then summarized four proposals that U.S. officials had developed thus far to employ Koreans for military purposes, none of which, it

acknowledged Haan (rather than a third party) as the story's source. Secondary sources have noted that Tōjō occasionally was a target for assassination, but failed to mention this particular incident. For example, see Robert J. C. Butow, *Tojo and the Coming of the War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961), 446; Edwin P. Hoyt, *Warlord: Tōjō Against the World* (Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1993), 167, 195, 201–202.

39 State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, "Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort," 23 April 1945, in Yi Kilsang (ed.), *Haebang chōnhusa charyojip. I: Mi kukjōng chunbi charyo (Collection of Historical Documents Before and After Liberation. I: Materials of United States Administration Preparation)* (Seoul: Wonju munhwasa, 1992), 253–63.

40 Ibid., pp. 254–55.

lamented, had produced satisfactory results. The KPG had generated two proposals. One, presented in September 1943, petitioned for Lend-Lease supplies and financial assistance for distribution to the “five hundred to one thousand Koreans (who it claimed to be assembled) in Unoccupied China for sabotage and espionage against the Japanese ...” The United States had taken no significant action at that time on this plan. A second proposal the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in Chongqing submitted entertained a request KPG Foreign Minister Tjo So-wang (Cho So-ang) put forth that repeated the contents of the earlier proposal, but suggested that the United States train Korean ex-POWs on a Pacific Island base off the coast of China. Tjo further proposed that the KPG prepare leaflets for airplane drops and employ Korean agents to conduct espionage work.⁴¹

The above proposals incorporated elements of the “irregular warfare” tactics that the OSS was considering at that moment. These tactics included espionage, sabotage, and other activities designed to “undermine enemy morale and that of his collaborators” and to “raise the morale of [people in] occupied territories.”⁴² The physical and linguistic similarities that Koreans shared with the Japanese, OSS officials believed, made them ideal for such operations. The SWNCC report acknowledged that the OSS had selected for training a small group of Korean-Americans and alien Koreans, of whom nine had completed the program and deployed to the field. An additional twelve recruits presently were receiving training. It remained too early to determine whether this project would yield results. Finally, as a fourth possibility, the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy also had considered forming Korean POWs and civilians into a fighting unit under the command of Korean-American officers. These troops would carry a Korean flag, but fight under the command of the American theater commander. The report credited this particular plan to a J. Kyang Dunn, who represented a United Korean Committee, a coalition of Korean independence groups based in Los Angeles that formed in April 1941.⁴³

The SWNCC report’s compilers recognized the benefits of employing Korean wartime assistance in some capacity, but nevertheless cautioned against extending this in any way that suggested U.S. support of a Korean political body. They saw organizing Koreans into a fighting unit as useful for the current war situation, but also for a “[U.S.] military government of Korea after the

41 Ibid., pp. 255–57.

42 “Irregular Warfare,” undated, folder 128, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records.

43 State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, “Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort,” pp. 257–58.

liberation of that country.” Furthermore, the report’s discussion section warned that the Soviet Union, as it had done in the European theater, most likely already had begun training Koreans in Siberia for the eventual liberation of Korea and invasion of Japan. The United States had to follow suit because it would be “most unfortunate if the only trained group of Koreans [were] those with Communist indoctrination.”⁴⁴ At the same time, the SWNCC report cautioned against any plan that utilized Koreans presently residing in Free China—that is Koreans not then “in [American] hands”—for operations behind Japanese lines. Doing so, it reminded, possibly could require U.S. recognition of the KPG or its placement of funds directly into the hands of Koreans in China, two actions that the U.S. government should avoid at all costs.⁴⁵

This discussion added a positive note in emphasizing the “powerful propaganda weapon” Korean mobilization might deliver:

The existence of a Korean fighting unit ... actively participating under the Korean flag in the war against Japan would provide the Allies with a powerful propaganda weapon which could be used to undermine Japanese morale, to build up Korean morale, and to encourage passive and perhaps active resistance to the Japanese by the Koreans in Korea and Japan.⁴⁶

Korean participation in the war effort might further provide “exiled Koreans in the United States and elsewhere something to support and work for, and therefore might cause them to unite and to cease their chronic bickering.” As mentioned above, Korean deployment in some form also might have provided a post-liberation spillover effect had they redeployed in accompanying the U.S. troops occupying Korea following Japan’s defeat.

44 Ibid., 260. Suzuki Masayuki writes that the Soviets had been training Koreans from the late 1930s, albeit at a level that would not provoke conflict with Japan. Suzuki, “The Korean National Liberation Movement in China and International Response,” p. 125. This warning may have reflected what Diane S. Clemens argues was from April 1945 a major turning point in U.S.-Soviet cooperation. Diane S. Clemens, “Averell Harriman, John Deane, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the ‘Reversal of Co-operation’ with the Soviet Union in April 1945,” *The International History Review* 14, no. 2 (May 1992): 227–306.

45 State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, “Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort,” pp. 257–58.

46 Takashi Fujitani sees this argument as similar to that behind the U.S. employing Japanese-Americans in its military in *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 98.

Finally, the SWNCC report balanced optimism with caution. It advised that should the U.S. military train Koreans for post-liberation administrative or policing duties, it must ensure that the force did not grow powerful enough to support one particular political body or establish a government in its own right. While the report doubted that an armed force large enough to assume the latter role could emerge, it did recognize that the emergence of the former potential would be just as disturbing as offering a single Korean group such “political prestige as to render it troublesome prior to and after liberation of Korea.”⁴⁷ This statement reveals much about U.S. postwar interests in Korea as embedded in its vow to “liberate” the country from Japanese rule. While it would welcome a force strong enough to assist in a U.S. occupation’s governing of the peninsula, the strength of this force would have to remain under U.S. control, lest it ally with an indigenous political body that potentially could contest its post-liberation plans for trusteeship. The difficulty of maintaining this delicate balance, coupled with the loyalty that Eagle Project members such as Kim Chun-yōp displayed toward the KPG, suggested reasons for banishing the Koreans to China as U.S. troops marched into southern Korea early in September 1945.

A modest core of Koreans capable of forming a military nucleus for occupation duty did exist in parts of various groups that different arms of the U.S. military and intelligence had trained over the course of the war. A proposal to start a Korean Training Center that the OSS would run in California outlined the extent of these efforts. This report drew from the experiences of an earlier program conducted outside of Washington, D.C.—The Washington Project—to make its case. Graduating eight of twelve Korean candidates exposed three major problems that plagued its operations: poor selection and screening of candidates, a limited scope of instruction, and delayed placement of its graduates in the field.⁴⁸ The report recommended an expanded program that would employ the cooperation of various Korean organizations to recruit as many as one hundred Koreans. This would increase the chances that this California project had direct contact over a larger number of eligible men and still escape “the limited and somewhat partisan nature of the contacts ... which are largely channeled through the offices of Dr. Syngman Rhee.”

47 State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, “Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort,” pp. 259–63.

48 U.S. Government, OSS, California Office, “Preliminary Report: A Proposed Korean Training Center in California,” 31 May 1943, Records of the Office of Strategic Service, RG 226, NAIL, pp. 1–2. The author is grateful to Michael McMillian at the University of Hawaii for providing him with this document.

Plans for a California project also called for the exposure of applicants to a wider range of training, including espionage, guerrilla leadership, and commando tactics. As a result, they would gain skills much broader in scope than participants in a project in Washington, D.C. that limited training to commando and saboteur tactics. It also would exploit Korean assets, which it listed as their ability to “successfully pose as Japanese ... [and] assume an innocuous identity as a common Chinese or Korean laborer or farmer”; their “deep desire to destroy Japanese installations with their own hands”; their detailed knowledge of their homeland; and their language capacity in Korean, but also in Japanese and Chinese.⁴⁹ Successful graduates in the proposed California project would be integrated into units of the U.S. military, thus requiring the involvement of the War Department and the training of U.S. Army personnel in Korean affairs. Finally, the report suggested Hawaii, rather than California, as a possible alternative training site. Moving the project to these islands would increase the pool of potential recruits to 7,400 (against 1,800 mainland Koreans). Regardless of the site for conducting the training, the report stressed as critical that the project’s graduates rapidly deploy to locations where they could utilize their newly acquired skills properly and effectively.⁵⁰

Whether through the California proposal or another program, the OSS did welcome Koreans at its training center located on Catalina Island in southern California. Limited information exists regarding the extent to which graduates of this program contributed to the war effort. At least one Korean, Kim Kang, who trained both at the Washington, D.C. and Catalina Island sites, apparently never saw combat action.⁵¹ One contingent of Korean-Americans who might have trained at these locations was expected to arrive in China as part of the Eagle Project in mid-1945.⁵² The proposal, as written, included two measures

49 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

50 The proposal suggested a Mr. Yong Hak Park as a “highly desirable man to use as a central figure in developing this Korean program.” Ibid., 5–6.

51 Marn J. Cha, *Koreans in Central California (1903–1957): A Study of Settlement and Transnational Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), 137–38.

52 FESI (Far East, Secret Intelligence), Japan-China Section, to Chief SI, China Theater, “Koreans for Eagle Project,” 13 June 1945, folder 129, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records. The OSS trained David Kim as such and sent him to China as a member of this Korean-American contingent. His American wife included his story in a book she wrote about her life, but does not tell where he received his training. Agnes Davis Kim, *I Married A Korean* (New York: John Day Company, 1953), 188. Yŏng-ho Ch’oe reports on three Korean POWs the OSS transported to Catalina Island for training in his “Korean Prisoners-of-War in Hawaii During World War II and the Case of US Navy Abduction of

that might have changed the texture of the U.S. occupation in southern Korea had they been implemented: training a unit of Korean troops to police southern Korea after the war and training a contingent of U.S. military officials in Korean matters. The dearth of such personnel in the American zone of occupation from its start in September 1945 suggests that the project failed to deliver this invaluable human resource to an operation that suffered from an overwhelming reliance on the knowledge and influence of the Japanese as opposed to the Koreans on the scene.⁵³

The Eagle Project, located just outside of Xian, China, represented another attempt to train Koreans. The proposal issued for this project explained that the easing of a major drawback to employing China-based Koreans—the factional disputes separated two generals in the Korean Independence Army, Kim Yak-sun and Lee Bum-Suk (Yi Pöm-sök or his Chinese name Li Fan-hsi)—now allowed for its advancement.⁵⁴ This breakthrough cleared the way for the training of members from this military force. The report was unique in its clear and positive expression of Korea's importance in the war against Japan:

Korea is Japan's most vital, strategic area outside Japan Proper. It contains many strategic war industries. It is a staging area for military operations in Manchuria, North China and Southeast Asia. It is Japan's most invulnerable channel of communication with Japanese-held areas on the continent. Korea's support of Japan's war requirements in industry, natural resources, manpower and communications makes skilled knowledge of Korea essential for strategic planning and preparing to defeat Japan. Yet, our certain knowledge of military and related activities in Korea is frequently, uncertain and inadequate. At present, our sources of intelligence about military activity in Korea are restricted to "remote-control" sources,

Three Korean Fishermen," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (7 December 2009), http://japanfocus.org/-Yong_ho-Ch_oe/3266 (accessed 21 November 2013).

53 See Richard D. Robinson's unpublished manuscript, "Betrayal of a Nation," (1950), 7–9. Robinson served in this occupation in the U.S. Military Government's Department of Public Information and later as a War Department historian for the occupation in the Intelligence Section of XXIV Corps Headquarters. He, along with others the U.S. Army sent to Korea, received training in preparation for the Japanese occupation at one of the Japanese language instruction centers the U.S. military established during the World War II.

54 SI Branch, OSS, China Theater, "The Eagle Project for SI Penetration of Korea," 24 February 1945, folder 129, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records. Apparently, Kim Yak-sun and his troops at that time were cooperating with the British in India.

such as photo-cover, radio intercept, and publication analysis. To date, Korea has been virtually unpenetrated for strategic or tactical intelligence.⁵⁵

The OSS also had at its disposal a contingent of experienced Koreans ready and eager to participate in a U.S.-sponsored program. The core candidates included fifty Koreans who had spent time in Japanese-controlled territories, many of whom had deserted the Japanese military.

Should the first stage prove successful, this proposal advised prudence before gradual expansion. An initial trial period would “train, organize, and infiltrate 45 Korean intelligence agents into Korea in early summer, 1945, to collect and report strategic and tactical intelligence.” It predicted that within 150 days from the start of a three-month training period, “intelligence should be flowing from Korea to the OSS.” Planners anticipated that, once on location, there would be augmentation of the efforts of the Korean agents from a “sizeable underground” that had “considerable potential military value in hastening Allied defeat of Japan and in conserving American lives and material.”⁵⁶

The Koreans were to undergo a rather intense training period designed to identify and then separate the 45 agents that the OSS would drop into Korea from an original cadre of 120 candidates. Once chosen, the agents would be divided into five groups of nine to operate in five different zones situated between the Korean peninsula’s northeast to southeast extremes. The candidates’ training was to include “intelligence collection and reporting, code, security and self defense, including the use of firearms.” It also would emphasize both physical and morale development. Once situated in Korea the agents would engage in a rather extensive list of activities that included investigation of war-related facilities (transportation and communication), Japanese restrictions on the Korean people, and Korean responses to the wartime situation. Korean agents also would focus on two additional concerns: the state of the underground movement and potential applications of psychological warfare on the peninsula. They also would report on counter-espionage measures that the Japanese police had installed against Korean dissenters.⁵⁷

The OSS targeted General Yi Pöm-sök as their primary Korean operative in the Eagle Project. At 44, he had been in the military for close to thirty years. Blessed with regal blood, his education began in the royal palace just as the curtain began to fall on the aged Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). After annexation

55 Ibid., p. 1.

56 Ibid., pp. 1–2, 4.

57 Ibid., pp. 14–15.

in 1910, at the age of ten, he was sent to Japan for study. He would continue his education in Russia and in China, where he graduated from the Yunnan Military Academy Calvary School in 1919. Though his English was weak, he handled at least three other languages rather fluently. OSS officials, who saw him as a soldier “with no personal ambitions beyond his desire to aid in gaining Korea’s freedom from Japan,”⁵⁸ recruited him after he had gained extensive military experience in the field. In a follow-up report compiled after the Eagle Project had commenced training, U.S. commander Captain Clyde B. Sargent endorsed Yi as an interesting blend of “commander and father”:

Without intimacy or familiarity, he has a paternal feeling for [his men], and they appear to return to him proper respect and obedience due their commanding officer and also a feeling of spiritual dependence upon him [T]hey address him as ‘ba-ba’ [p’ap’a]. The [Korean] equivalent of ‘Father.’⁵⁹

Yi’s troops, Sargent reported, were extremely disciplined because of this paternal relationship.

Sargent’s first monthly report, issued in late May 1945, detailed the training facilities he and his subordinates had prepared for the Koreans, and listed the problems that the Eagle Project had experienced to date. However, his conclusion about the progress of the program was upbeat, as he professed his confidence in its “unlimited” potential. The project rented a temple complex and a village home, complete with a small hall equipped “with about ten hideous and frightening wooden gods” to guard its supplies. In this environment, the Americans had carved out living quarters and conducted training exercises. Many of the buildings in the complex were in disarray and required extensive maintenance. Despite the praiseworthy efforts of General Yi and his highly disciplined Korean trainees, personnel problems persisted. Competent interpreters were desperately needed, Sargent reported, along with a Special Intelligence Officer to “direct and coordinate all intelligence materials.” This officer would require several assistants who specialized in handling intelligence matters. Finally, Sargent emphasized the need for stronger security and area defense measures. He expressed concern over the “general hostility toward this

58 Ibid., p. 18.

59 Clyde B. Sargent, “Monthly Report for May: Eagle Project,” 30 May 1945, folder 129, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, pp. 10–11. Kim Chun-yŏp echoed these sentiments in his recollections of their shared experience in Keijō on the Bird mission. Kim, *Changjŏng*, pp. 536–49.

American-Korean joint operation," though he failed to indicate the source of this enmity.

Despite these complications, Sargent remained optimistic. He recommended that the U.S. government recruit more Koreans, even though the time-consuming process of ascertaining their strengths and knowledge was wasting the immediate contributions that the Korean recruits could make toward winning the war. Sargent advised that the solution to this problem was having more Americans with language competence (understanding not only Korean, but also Japanese) join the Eagle Project. To date, Robert J. Myers, a U.S. agent who was proficient in Japanese, was performing the bulk of this work, but was doing so alone. Thus, progress was slow.⁶⁰ This limitation no doubt prompted a 11 May 1945 memorandum Lieutenant Colonel Paul Helliwell in Chongqing sent to Washington that informed as follows: "Can use [Horace] Underwood in connection with the Eagle Project," with "no training needed."⁶¹

The Eagle Project forged close relations with the KPG that ignored the warning found in the SWNCC report discussed above. Program planners, however, saw these ties as essential to its success. Pursuing this connection also might have compromised possible roles that capable Koreans such as General Yi could have played in U.S. occupation administration after Korea's liberation. U.S. officials who held a meeting with "president" Kim Ku at KPG headquarters in T'u-ch'iae, twenty-five miles outside of Chongqing, carried out many symbolic diplomatic acts generally reserved for ceremonies that accompanied official meetings between heads of state. On 3 April, Captain Sargent met with Kim, who introduced the American contingent to the 37 members of the Korean Independence Army the KPG had selected as candidates for the Eagle Project. General Yi and several KPG cabinet members also attended the gathering. After lunch, Sargent spoke briefly and the Koreans, at the request of the Americans, sang a marching song and the "Korean National Anthem." Later that day, Sargent reported, he and Yi escorted the new group of "intelligent, alert, and keen" recruits to the training complex.⁶² In other memoranda,

60 Sargent, "Monthly Report for May," pp. 6–7. For Myers' experiences, see his *Korea in the Cross Currents*, Chapter 5.

61 Lieutenant Colonel Paul Helliwell to Secretary of State, 11 May 1945, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records. Horace G. Underwood, a long time resident of Seoul, was fluent in the Korean language. During World War II, he studied at the U.S. Navy Japanese Language School in Boulder, Colorado.

62 Sargent, 3 April 1945, "Korea File," folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records.

people affiliated with the Eagle Project with their words and activities hinted at recognition of the KPG as Korea's recognized government; on one occasion, Sargent sought "approval of the Korean Provisional Government to move ... personnel" to the training center.⁶³ Another memorandum mentioned the need to prepare KPG passports for the recruits.⁶⁴

Kim Ku's autobiography describes a meeting that he had with OSS Director William J. Donovan, who had flown to KPG headquarters to confer with him under the shadows of their respective national flags.⁶⁵ Donovan may have been acting out of turn. His meeting with Kim and chumming with members of the KPG reportedly "infuriated" President Harry S. Truman.⁶⁶ In any event, Japan's sudden surrender on 15 August 1945 not only ended the war, but it also signaled the beginning of the end of American interaction with these Koreans and a new more congenial U.S.-Japan relationship. For example, the tension that greeted the Bird mission's arrival in Keijō that late summer day promptly softened as the two sides began to communicate. Although the Americans informed them that they were not there to accept their surrender, the Japanese insisted that they could not grant the request from the Americans for information on Allied POWs without orders from Tokyo. Displaying intentions to be cooperative, the Japanese did promise the visitors the 100-octane fuel they required to make the return trip to the Chinese mainland. It would not arrive, however, until the next day. The Bird mission would have to spend the night on the enemy airbase. The congeniality that the two enemies discovered during this and future meetings served as an omen for the great reversal that characterized Japan-U.S. relations after the guns of war had silenced and peace resumed. On this particular evening, as Japanese joined American for supper, the Japanese began a sing-a-thon that eventually saw both sides trading military tunes. As the Americans belted out "off we go into the wild blue

63 Sargent to Helliwell and Major Quentin Roosevelt, "Recruiting Koreans at Ju-ch'eng," 16 July 1945, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records.

64 Sargent and Helliwell memorandum to Kermit Roosevelt, 7 August 1945, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records.

65 Kim Ku, *The Autobiography of Kim Ku* [Paekpōm Ilchi], Jongsoo Lee (trans.) (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 283–84.

66 Yu, *OSS in China* 229–30. Soon after, President Harry S. Truman dissolved the OSS. Douglas Waller writes that Truman "dressed down [OSS Director William J.] Donovan in a snippy note, telling him he had no business 'acting as a channel for the transmission to me of messages from representatives of self-styled governments which are not recognized by the Government of the United States.'" Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 323.

yonder," the Japanese "beamed and beat time on the table with their fingers."⁶⁷

The Korean members of the Eagle Mission, after returning to the Shantung peninsula, were denied access to Korea, as the United States XXIV Corps landed and established their ill-fated occupation administration in southern Korea. Rather than utilize the Koreans they left in Weixin, their American handlers transported them deeper into the Chinese interior, back to the training facility in Xian. Mysteriously, U.S. officials would not return the trusted and competent General Yi Pöm-sök to Korea until the following spring,⁶⁸ even though on at least one occasion he petitioned the United States to allow him to assist U.S. forces as they prepared to enter the peninsula.⁶⁹ David Kim, a U.S.-based Korean who the OSS had recruited for training in China, returned to the United States after Japan's defeat and did not return to southern Korea until early 1946.⁷⁰ His orders to accompany U.S. troops into southern Korea apparently misdirected, the Korean-language competent Horace Underwood found himself on a minesweeper combing the waters between Fukuoka and Pusan. He did not arrive in Seoul until May 1946.⁷¹

U.S. military forces landed at In'chön in early September 1945 and proceeded to Seoul with a dearth of personnel with knowledge on Korean affairs. Indeed, like Richard D. Robinson, a healthy number had received training for

67 "Yank Rescue Team Cursed and Wined By Japs in Korea." Bird's superiors later reprimanded him for fraternizing with the enemy. A similar event took place in the Chōsen Hotel in Seoul on 1 September 1945 after a small advance team arrived in the city. "No sooner had the group arrived," Richard D. Robinson recalls, "than it took over a suite of rooms in the Chōsen Hotel in Seoul—the largest and plushiest hotel in Korea—and threw a big party for ranking Japanese military and government officials. Koreans who approached the Americans to discuss their plight were summarily shown the door with a minimum of courtesy. The affair turned into a glorious drunken brawl with the Japanese, which lasted for several days." Robinson, "The Betrayal of a Nation," 15. Kim Chun-yōp remembers Koreans requesting the Japanese to sing one of their songs, but only after the commanding officer got on his knees to offer General Yi Pöm-sök a drink, a gesture the Koreans interpreted as a demonstration of surrender. Kim, *Changjōng*, p. 547.

68 Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, p. 506.

69 Richard Heppner to Colonel William P. Davis, 4 September 1945, folder 127, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station. Here, Richard Heppner quotes correspondence with Willis H. Bird that forwarded General Yi's request that Bird inform Generals Albert C. Wedemeyer and Douglas MacArthur of the value that Koreans could provide U.S. forces in the occupation of southern Korea.

70 Kim, *I Married a Korean*, p. 188.

71 Horace G. Underwood, *Korea in War, Revolution and Peace: The Recollections of Horace G. Underwood*, Michael J. Devine (ed.) (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), 95–96, 102–103.

occupation duty in Japan, only to be redirected at the last minute to southern Korea. Ignorance compelled the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) to turn to the Japanese colonial administration for help. Therefore, General Douglas MacArthur, as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), initially ordered the Japanese, along with their Korean trainees, to maintain their positions during colonial rule until Koreans had received the necessary training to replace them. Korean outrage forced the purge of the former, but not the latter. These decisions provided political groups with incendiary political fuel for use in their destabilizing attacks on the U.S. administration and conservative Korean factions that harbored *ch'inilp'a*—Koreans suspected of collaborating with the colonial-era Japanese administration. The political disarray in the south, the growing rift with the Soviet Union, and the absence of progress toward reuniting the two halves of the peninsula gradually encouraged the USAMGIK's embrace of rightwing Koreans. Coupled with the decision to hold elections only in the south in May 1948, this seriously undermined Korea's democratic process. Rhee gained the presidency only after his primary political rivals, including Kim Ku, decided to boycott an election that only further cemented Korean division.⁷² Thus, the Korean people, even under U.S. administration, hardly had the "right ... to choose the ultimate form and personnel of the government which they might want to establish," the critical argument justifying the Allied wartime decision to reject extending recognition to the KPG or any other political group.

It is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, to predict what difference U.S. recognition of a Korean political entity and support of its military activities might have had following Korea's liberation from Japanese rule. At the same time, it is hard not to imagine the benefits that a U.S. occupation force might have enjoyed had it returned with a contingent of Korean political and military personnel to assist with the governing and policing of the peninsula. But because U.S. officials lacked this foresight, they could not adopt more ambitious plans than those approved prior to the end of the Pacific war. Doing so would have freed U.S. occupation officials from having to rely exclusively at first on the Japanese and then the most ardent Korean collaborators, which would have eliminated one of the major, and legitimate, claims that the radical left used to defend its cause. It also would have provided the U.S. occupation with the option, as in Japan, of exercising its authority indirectly through an

72 This boycott also included members of the leading left-wing parties that the U.S. military government had long been suppressing and Korean Revolutionary Party leader Kim Kyu-sik. One other potential candidate was moderate left-wing leader Yō Unhyōng, who had been assassinated in July 1947.

indigenous regime (rather than directly as a military government). Forming such an administrative arrangement might have provided the legitimacy with the Korean people that the USAMGIK lacked, thereby eliciting greater popular support and cooperation. Backing the KPG was far from the ideal choice, given its conservative politics and close ties with Jiang Jieshi's Guomindang. However, it did present a viable alternative to offset the deficiencies of U.S. military rule in southern Korea when it began in September 1945.